Moderator Package

Student Focus Groups

This document is intended to assist AISI teams in facilitating student focus groups on our 3 themes: Student Engagement, Assessment, and Technology Integration. Additional school-specific questions may be added.

2010

AISI

Chinook's Edge School Division #73

2/19/2010

**Student Focus Group**

**Moderator Guide**

1. **INTRODUCTION: (3 min)**

Purpose: The moderator greets the participants and explains the objectives of focus group and reviews the rules.

Instructions: \*\*\*wording will need to be adjusted according to grade level\*\*\*

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_I am going to run our discussion today and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will be our note taker. My job is to make sure that we cover our questions and to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to be involved. Our purpose today is to find out what you, as students, think about your interest in school, how you use technology and how you use feedback that your teachers give you. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. The purpose is to find out what your personal opinions are, and everyone’s opinion is equally important to us. **We will try to keep our conversation within a one hour time limit.**

Before we get started, here are some ground rules and points of information: [may want to post this and refer to it]

1. Please talk one at a time.
2. Avoid side conversations with neighbors
3. We need to hear from everyone in the course of the discussion, but you don’t have to answer every question.
4. Feel free to respond directly to someone who has made a point. You don’t have to address your comments to me.
5. Say what is true for you. Don’t let the group decide your opinion for you.
6. **We do not use names of students, teachers or parents in discussions.**
7. Respect for opinions: You may find that you disagree with an opinion voiced here by another person. That is OK, and I hope you will say so when that happens in a respectful and polite way. You also may change your mind in the middle of our discussion, perhaps as a result of something that someone else says, and again I hope you will say so, if and when that happens.
8. Don’t hesitate to stop us as we are writing if what we have written does not accurately reflect your comments.
9. This discussion is completely anonymous and confidential. There will be no record of what you say with your name on it. We are not going to quote anyone specifically using her/his name. ***You were all randomly selected to participate in this session, and we appreciate that you have taken time out of your lives to come today.***

Directly quoted from : Abt Associates. (2004). *Principal focus group questions: Moderator guide.* Retrieved February 3, 2010, from <http://www.abt.sliidea.org/dci/principals%20guide.pdf>

1. **Focus Group Questions (see Logistics section below for more detailed information)**
   1. Assessment Practices (10-15 min)
      1. How do you use assessment feedback to improve your learning? [*probes may need to include: information from rubrics, tests, teachers – goal is to get at the assessment practices]*
   2. Student Engagement (20 min)
      1. Describe what it looks and sounds like when you are interested [engaged] in your learning. [*probes may need to include – what does the task look like, what is the teacher doing, what are you doing, what is being required of you…]*
      2. What makes it difficult for you to learn at your best?
      3. What can we do to help your learning?
   3. Technology (10-15 min)
      1. How do you use technology to help you learn? *[this reflects current use, you may hear outside of school examples, probe only if students are stuck or if you want them to expand their answers]*
2. **Wrap-Up** 
   1. We’ve covered a lot of ground in our time together. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about in relation to our 3 topics?
   2. Thank you
   3. May also want to write thank you notes/cards (depending on group)

**Logistics: Student Focus Groups**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Think About:** | **Notes to Self:** |
| 1. Selection of students – ideal group size is around 12 students:    1. Random selection       1. Balance males/females       2. Balance grades       3. Balance subject areas ?? (high school/middle)    2. Running of 1 or more focus groups depending on school configuration       1. K-4; 5-9; 10-12? |  |
| 1. When is the most appropriate time for students to do this?    1. Will need to communicate with teachers about student absences |  |
| 1. Will you provide snacks? Lunch? |  |
| 1. How will you thank the students?    1. Thank you cards    2. Gift Certificates    3. Other |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Focus Group Process:**

Ideal student group size is up to 12 people.

***Up to 12 people:***

1. Sit at tables so participants can see each other (ideally).
2. Several options exist, depending on your comfort level with the group:
   1. **Option A – Large group discussion with note taking**
      1. Work as a large group with one facilitator and one note taker.
      2. Work through the self reflection and 3 questions as a large group discussion
      3. Note taker should record on chart paper or SMART board or on laptop that is attached to a projector. Notes need to be seen by the group.
   2. **Option B – Post-it-Note Format** 
      1. Facilitator:
         1. Question 1:
            1. Have participants write down ideas to questions on post-it-notes first. One idea per post-it-note related to the topic.

D:\Documents and Settings\lsteele\Local Settings\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\VVKK40KB\MCj04248280000[1].wmf

* + - * 1. Each member talks by putting post-it-note in the centre of the table, going around the groups so everyone has a voice. Continue until all post it notes are exhausted.
        2. Note taker is recording ideas on chart paper as discussion continues. Note taker may start to notice themes and can record or make headings according to themes on chart paper/SMART board/computer with projector
        3. At the end of the first question, facilitators or note taker should review notes on chart paper, ask if there are any additions.
      1. Question 2: Repeat process
  1. **Option C – Personal Record Sheets and Chart paper**
     1. Question 1:
        + 1. Facilitator asks participants to write down initial thoughts on the first topic on a sheet of paper provided to each participant. ***These sheets can be collected by the table facilitator once the conversation has been exhausted.***



* + - * 1. Each member takes a turn sharing ideas from their sheet going around the group so everyone has a voice. Continue until all ideas are exhausted. Participants may continue to write down ideas on their individual sheets.
        2. Table facilitator either takes notes on chart paper or assigns one of the group members to take notes. Note taker should record on chart paper or SMART Board or on laptop that is attached to a projector. Notes need to be seen by the group.
        3. Facilitator will need to make sure there is participation from all members.
        4. Upon completion of the first question, go over what has been written, ask if there is anything else that they would like to add.
    1. Go on to second question and repeat process.

1. **You may need to break up the 3 questions with mini-games to keep the energy up. We have the following games ready for you: [just email Lissa, Kory, or Margo and we’ll get you the games]**
   1. **Cup stacking with elastic bands [kit]**
   2. **Card slap [kit]**
2. You may choose to use a tape recorder. Analyzing data from the tape recorder requires you to either analyze the data as you re-listen to the tape OR have the tape transcribed. If you need help with transcriptions, Olds College has an office assistant program that will transcribe your data for a donation to their program. [contact Carmel Maloney at 403-556-4648 or email her at cmaloney@olds college.ca]. **If you choose to use a tape recorder, you should still have someone actively taking notes.**

**Materials:**



* Snacks
* Post-it-notes
* Pencils/pens
* Individual participant sheets with focus group questions
* Chart paper
* Markers
* Mini-games (from Lissa, Kory or Margo)
* SMART Board or laptop and projector(s) for recording answers– may want to use for small groups

**Tips on Managing the focus Group Session**

* + - 1. Once you present a question to the group, it is important to step back and allow the discussion to progress with only a minimal amount of interruption on your part.
      2. Do not steer the conversation to answers you want to hear ☺
      3. Allow periods of silence. Silence is uncomfortable…but silence is also golden…
      4. Avoid asking questions that seem to suggest a correct answer.
      5. Try not to let strong personalities dominate the discussion.
      6. Encourage input by those who are less inclined to speak out on the questions being discussed.
      7. Make every effort to practice good listening skills.

Directly quoted from: Israel, G., & Galindo-Gonzalez, S. (2008). *Using focus group interviews for planning or evaluating extension programs.* University of Florida.Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/PD/PD03600.pdf>

**Analyzing Focus Group Data**



* Analysis is used to indentify overarching themes related to the questions that were discussed and the range of perspectives expressed by the participants.
* Common considerations in analyzing focus group data are:
  + Words: identify commonly used words; cluster similar concepts together; arrange responses on a continuum or in categories. Also consider nonverbal communication related to the words, such as body language and the intensity expressed by the speed, volume, or pitch of speech.
  + Patterns: Do participants change or reverse statement after hearing from each other? What comments were offered by more than one participant? What themes were supported or rejected by more than one participant? What issues or questions were especially easy or difficult for the group to resolve?
  + Specificity of Responses: Give more weight to responses that are specific and based on experiences than those that are vague and impersonal. Give more weight to responses in the first person rather than hypothetical third person.
* Use a several colored highlighters or markers to color code themes in the data.
* Directly quoted from: Tobacco Control Evaluation Center. (n.d.). *Tips & tools #4: Focus Group Interviews*.Retrieved February 19, 2010, from <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/5715/27616.pdf>

****

**Reporting Focus Group Data**

* Information about the number of people who participated in the focus group and the number of focus groups conducted should be included.
* Key themes in the data should be presented in relation to our 3 themes:
  + Student assessment
  + Student engagement
  + Technology use
* Direct quotes can be used to illustrate the major ideas or perspectives that were identified in the focus group analysis.
* In is usually not appropriate to report the information in terms of the percentage of participants who gave one answer or another. The purpose of the focus is to understand the range of perspectives on the topic of interest.
* Source: Tobacco Control Evaluation Center. (n.d.). *Tips & tools #4: Focus Group Interviews*.Retrieved February 19, 2010, from http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/5715/27616.pdf

**References:**

Abt Associates. (2004). *Principal focus group questions: Moderator guide.* Retrieved February 3, 2010, from <http://www.abt.sliidea.org/dci/principals%20guide.pdf>

Berg, B. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

FGD. (2009). Focus group moderator’s guide: national survey of parents in SEE Countries. Retrieved February 3, 2010, from <http://www.google.com/search?q=teacher+focus+group+moderator+guide&rls=com.microsoft:en-us&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=1I7SKPB_en>

Krueger, R. (n.d.). *Focus group interviewing.* Retrieved February 2, 2010, from <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html>

Lee, T. (1999). *Using qualitative methods in organizational research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**Appendix A**



**Sample Parent Letter and Letter of Consent**

Parental Informed Consent Form

Chinook’s Edge School Division No. 73

Focus Group Participation

TITLE OF PROJECT: Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

PERSONS IN CHARGE:

***AISI team***

***Name***

***Address***

***Phone number***

PERSONS IN

The feedback we are requesting from your child is part of our school’s Alberta Initiative for School Improvement project. This study focuses on student engagement in the 21st century.

If you agree to allow your child to provide us with feedback, he/she will be asked to participate in a focus group on ***{insert date and time here}*** with other students in which they will be asked to talk about their interest in school, how they use technology and how they use feedback that their teachers give. The specific questions have been attached to this letter.

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this study (that is, not beyond those encountered in the course of everyday life). You should remember that during each of the discussions your child does not have to answer any question(s) that he/she does not wish to answer. They will be free to leave the group at any time. Further, you or your child may ask questions about our focus group procedures at any time and these questions will be answered.

The information your child gives us is confidential. To protect your child’s identity, they will not be identified personally in any way. A final report will be compiled based on the information gathered during the focus group, however, no personally identifying information will be disclosed.

Informed Consent

(Parent or Guardian)

This is to certify that I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , hereby agree to allow my

(Parent or Guardian’s Name)

child \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to volunteer in the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement focus group.

I understand the information given to me. The investigation and my child’s part in it have been fully explained to me and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the focus group. I understand and agree to the conditions of the focus group as described.

I understand that my child will be part of a group process where he/she will be asked to share opinions with other students.

I understand that my child is free to decline to answer specific questions or items in the focus group.

I understand that any data or answers to questions will remain confidential.

I further understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my child’s participation in this focus group.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date Parent’s (or Guardian’s) Signature



Informed Consent

Student

I,\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , agree to be part of a study about student

(Student’s Name)

engagement in the 21st century. This focus group is being done as part of our school’s Alberta Initiative for School Improvement project.

I understand that I will be asked to take part in a focus group and will be asked questions about student engagement (how you learn best), student assessment, and student use of technology. I do not have to answer any questions I don't want to answer, and I can leave the group at any time if I want to.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date Student’s Signature



Student Focus Group Questions

* 1. Assessment Practices (20 min)
     1. How do you use assessment feedback to improve your learning?
  2. Student Engagement (20 min)
     1. Describe what it looks and sounds like when you are engaged in your learning.
     2. What is holding you back from learning at your best?
     3. What can we do to overcome these obstacles?
  3. Technology (20 min)
     1. How do you use technology to help you learn?

**Appendix B**

**Sample Focus Group form for participants**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Theme 1: Student Assessment** |  |
| How do you use assessment feedback to improve your learning? |  |
| **Theme 2: Student Engagement** |  |
| Describe what it looks and sounds like when you are interested [engaged] in your learning. |  |
| What makes it difficult for you to learn at your best? |  |
| What can we do to help your learning? |  |
| **Theme 3: Technology Use** |  |
| How do you use technology to help you learn? |  |

**Appendix C**

**Notes for Focus Group Moderator AFTER Focus Group**

**Students**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **What worked?** | **What should we change for next time?** |
| **Initial contact process** |  |  |
| **Room**   * **Space** * **Arrangement** * **Location** * **other** |  |  |
| **Questions**   * **process of asking** * **types of questions** |  |  |
| **Thank you**   * **What we did** |  |  |
| **Other** |  |  |